

## St Therese's Parish Essendon

*Dear friends in Year 12 at Ave Maria College.*

Having been parish priest here in Essendon for the past 3 years or so, I thought I'd drop a line to wish you well in this challenging time for all of us, but particularly for you students pursuing VCE and VCAL in very different circumstances to the usual activities and pursuits we might have anticipated at the beginning of 2020. It is a very significant year for you, knowing that your future directions will be influenced by the results you obtain at the end of the year. No doubt this creates a degree of anxiety, even more so in a time such as this, where uncertainty about how things will turn out this year is ongoing. We hope for a vaccine to settle things down in our world, but there's no knowing if and when!

Last year, I appreciated the opportunity of celebrating the Year 12 Graduation Mass for your predecessors in 2019. How different are things this year, with the coronavirus pandemic and concern about the future, in many ways, but for you, how assessments might be made and what directions you might take for your futures, in terms of studies, careers and relationships.

Meanwhile, I understand you have to face up to ongoing SATs then a GAT, before end of year assessments or exams, which I guess are still being worked out! It's all a bit daunting, I know. And then many of you'll be hoping for a good ATAR, but it's **NOT** the end of the world if you don't get quite what you aim for. The acronyms are almost too much for me!! Whatever, there's always more time in the future to change direction and pursue new goals. (For example, my nephew Tim, after graduating in Commerce and working as an Accountant, at the age of 28, is now pursuing medicine at Melbourne Uni.)

I clearly remember my own anxiety, way back there in 1969, when I did what was called Matriculation, with the pressure of 100% of final 3-hour exams, in one big hit, effectively determining what course one might get into, with science subjects having a practical component. Then, now 50 years ago, I decided to start a Science degree at Melbourne University in 1970. It was an interesting time in all ways, but my discernment about what direction to take in my own life, went through considerable changes as time went on.

Change and adaptation to new circumstances and situations are a natural part of life, and here we find ourselves in a very unexpected scenario. In some ways, we can see this as a useful life lesson. We sure don't know what tomorrow might bring, even with the best laid plans.

It has not been an easy time for anyone, but particularly for parents who have to work from home and try and provide support for and understanding of their students at home like you, who have no doubt done your best to focus on a new way of learning and doing your assignments, without the normal physical presence of teachers and each other in

the classroom and beyond. One might wonder how they coped back there with the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1919, when the current means of modern technology and communication were just not even thought of!

In addition, on the down side, it is disappointing that you have not had the usual opportunities of leadership in your school, normal interaction and pursuit of other interests and activities, such as sports, music and drama, and the like, as I know you all looked forward to back at the beginning of what appeared to be a routine enough year in 2020. One absolute thing about life, however, is the necessity to accept change, and this year has been a real test of that, hasn't it? As I understand, your teachers, support staff and parents and carers, have all adapted well to applying new methods of sharing information and supporting you in your pursuits, despite the limitations that have gone on for what seems so long. We acknowledge their dedication, contribution and commitment with gratitude.

Whilst celebration of your graduation into the broader world of tertiary study and work, as a rite of transition or passage, will be limited and different this year, life goes on, and its unpredictable challenges and opportunities. I can only encourage you to be positive and move on with an optimistic view of life, determined to make good choices, accept the reality of mistakes along the way, and change directions here and there.

Hopefully, your Catholic education has given you an insight into responding to the Spirit in your lives and continuing to live the Gospel message of Jesus as committed Christians. It is all about a loving God, calling us to care and show consideration for others, making this world a better place by our presence in it, making a difference, determined to make a positive footprint (*not Carbon!*). The ups and downs will always be there. It is up to you and me to make the most of life, as time flies by. Be yourself, use free will well, and follow a well-formed conscience in the process.

I offer a thought from my favourite author, Dr Seuss, who once wrote a book titled: ***“Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?”*** In a wildly imaginative way, he reminds us of the relativity of our worries and concerns: *“When I was quite young and quite small for my size, I met an old man in the Desert of Drize. And he sang me a song I will never forget. At least, well, I haven't forgotten it yet. He sat in a terribly prickly place (on a cactus!). But he sang with a sunny sweet smile on his face. When you think things are bad, when you feel sour and blue, when you start to get mad... You should do what I do. Just tell yourself, Duckie, you're really quite lucky! Some people are much more... oh, ever so much more... oh, muchly much-much more unlucky than you! ... Think they work you too hard...? Think of poor Ali Sard! He has to mow grass in his uncle's backyard and its quick-growing grass and it grows as he mows it. The faster he mows it, the faster he grows it... So, don't you feel blue. Don't get down in the dumps. You're lucky you don't have a Borfin that slumps. And while we are at it, consider the Schlottz, the Crumple-horn, Web-footed, Green-bearded Schlottz, whose tail is entailed with unsolvable knots.... And you're lucky indeed, that you don't ride on a camel... And poor Mr Potter, T-crosser, I-dotter... And how fortunate you're not Professor de Breeze, who has spent the past 32 years, if you please, trying to teach Irish ducks how to read Javanese... Thank goodness for all of the things you are not! Thank goodness you're*

*not something someone forgot... that's why I say, "Duckie! Don't grumble! Don't stew! Some critters are much-much, oh ever so much-much, so muchly much-much unluckier than you!" So, try to not to be too angst about things, as you prepare for, and look forward, to taking a leap into 2021.*

*A wise word of advice to conclude, from a book titled "**I Knew You Could – A Book for All the Stops in Your Life**" (by Craig Dorfman) "**There's more about life that you'll learn as you go, because figuring things out on your own helps you grow. Just trust in yourself, and you'll climb every hill. Say, 'I think I can!' and you know what? You will!**"*

So, go for it! Do your best and wishing you and your families good health and happiness, and the best for your future, in whatever direction it takes you.



**John B Hannon**  
**PARISH PRIEST**

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